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Senate passes funding bill to avoid shutdown

The Hill

September 28, 2016



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The Senate on Wednesday passed a short-term bill to fund the government, days ahead of the Oct. 1 deadline to avoid a shutdown.

Senators voted 72-26 on the continuing resolution (CR) to fund the government through Dec. 9. With the legislation heading to the House, where it could be voted on as early as Wednesday, senators are expected to leave Washington until after the November election.

Lawmakers had hoped for a brief September session that would let vulnerable incumbents get back to the campaign trail. Republicans are defending 24 Senate seats this year, and Democrats are defending 10.

Instead, negotiations dragged out for weeks amid a myriad of policy battles, though leadership remained optimistic they would avoid a repeat of a 2013 shutdown.

Twelve Democrats and 14 Republicans voted against the spending bill. Sens. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) — who is running for vice president and returned to the Senate briefly Tuesday — and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) — who is out campaigning with Hillary Clinton on Wednesday — didn't vote.

The White House formally signaled its support for the bill Wednesday, though the Office of Management and Budget said in a statement that it was "disappointed" that a provision allowing the Export-Import Bank to make transactions larger than \$10 million was not included.

Wednesday's vote came after a late-night deal to include aid for the Flint, Mich., drinking water crisis broke a stalemate that was threatening to torpedo the Senate's bill.

House leadership will allow a vote on an amendment adding emergency funding for communities with lead-contaminated drinking water to a water infrastructure bill.

Democrats, who had been holding up the government funding bill over Flint aid, quickly threw their support behind the agreement.

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INVITATION ONLY 2016 Intergovernmental

"I've had conversations with people, I've been given the assurance by the Republican leadership that something will happen in the lame duck," Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) said. "I'm comfortable in talking to [House Speaker Nancy Pelosi] that the House feels comfortable with where they are on Flint."

In addition to Pelosi, Reid said he spoke with Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and Michigan lawmakers as they ironed out a final deal.

The Senate's vote means that it will move before the House has formally added the Flint money to its version of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).

Sen. Gary Peters (D-Mich.) brushed aside questions about whether Democrats should hold off on supporting the Senate's CR until after the House passes its water bill, saying they had "strong assurances" from leadership.

Peters and Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) vote against the spending bill because it did not include help for the drinking water crisis. He criticized the bill after the vote, saying "there is no excuse whatsoever for leaving the people of Flint behind."

The Senate CR also includes funding to fight the Zika virus, combat the opioid overdose crisis and provide emergency funding for floods in three states.

Democrats quickly claimed victory after the vote, noting the bill included Zika funding, does not expand into next year, and does not include a push by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) to block the Obama administration from transferring internet management authority to a global organization.

Sens. Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.) and Rob Portman (R-Ohio), who are both running for reelection and supported the spending bill, praised it for including funding for the opioid crisis.

**Meeting with DOE in
New Orleans, LA**

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"While there is more we need to do, this is an important step forward for New Hampshire," Ayotte said in a statement.

Portman added that the money was "critically important" so that the administration can quickly implement the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) that was passed this year.

"One of my biggest priorities is to ensure that CARA is implemented as quickly as possible, and I'm going to continue to push the Obama administration to do so," he said. "This funding ... is a down payment that also puts us on a path to fully funding CARA."

The Senate spending bill had drawn fierce backlash from conservative groups, who worry lawmakers will use a lame-duck session to break the budget caps.

"Leaders in both parties have agreed to tack on non-germane riders and promises to consider 'sidecar' legislation at another time," the Club for Growth said on Wednesday.

Heritage Action is also opposed to the bill.

Tiffany Muller, the executive director of the progressive outside group End Citizens United, also knocked the CR for not rolling back a Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) provision.

"Mitch McConnell's obsession with protecting the shady, dark moneyed interests that put him in power is damaging our democracy," she added.

Democrats have expressed frustration that the bill wouldn't reverse a policy rider included in last year's omnibus appropriations package that blocks the SEC from requiring corporations to disclose political spending.

Republicans are quick to note that because the SEC language is current law, they would have to attach a rider to this year's otherwise "clean" funding measure to unwind it.

